

Constant Remembering

The saying for today is 'Remember God constantly and call out to him in sighs.' *Remember God constantly and call out to him in sighs.*

So really, we have here two maxims and we have two inner activities in prayer . Remembering constantly. Calling out in sighs. And , as we shall see, these two inner acts - always remembering and an inarticulate inner 'sigh' of prayer - are joined in one single action in the soul .

What we have here then is this double maxim inviting us to explore how our natural potential for remembering experience and forgetting experience, for retaining it and letting it go. It is an invitation to explore how our powerful human potential of memory can be consciously and intentionally integrated into the spiritual life . The way the memory is drawn into the life of the heart is really at the heart of the understanding of recollection. The word 'recollection' in itself is essentially an act of recall or remembering.

It may help to contemplate the word 'memory ' and the way it is used in this context of recollection. It seems that here the word memory means more than the recall and storage of information. The word implies a state of soul where there is a real embodied , subtle inner remembering . We could bear in mind Osuna's phrase 'in the belly of the memory,' . The memory is like an ingesting, digesting organ of the soul-body. This wider meaning of memory implies the whole inner experience of receiving and retaining and living from spiritual sources of life and wisdom.

Discerning the impact of particular memories.

So to begin – we can explore how our ordinary memory of experiences in life – both painful and pleasurable - continue to play out . As we continue the soul work of watching and examining our inner experience we can bring an enquiring attention to memories that we all live with and are formed by. This is not to say that we are wanting to categorise memories as good or bad , or to 'not remember'. It is not even the necessary psychological work that may be involved in being in touch with repressed painful memories. The inner work of recollection here is as always to to

carefully discern the effect of this particular memory on the life of the soul. What Osuna speaks of is the way we tune into the underlying experiencing of our memories , seeing them from a spiritual perspective of the heart.

Healing of memories – the spiritual perspective

From this perspective the questioning we might bring in is : What is the remembering and forgetting that is going on at an essential level ? Osuna takes this line of enquiry with painful memories where we have been harmed. He offers a possibility for us to consider. One way in which we may discern the impact of painful memories that occupy our minds is this - our soul is being of kept in a state of forgetfulness that we are essentially lovable. He expands this further. Being occupied by this memory we may not only be forgetting that our essential and true nature is acceptable , but we forget that we are essentially desirable and beautiful in spirit. We may be forgetting that we are beloved of God. So this then, is the wisdom and healing of recollection – that we remember our deeper identity and nature.

Feeding our memories.

And a second way of working consciously and intentionally with memory is around the question of how we feed this soul belly memory of ours. What we put into our minds will occupy our memory - and is what we put into our minds nourishing ? Osuna invites us to take responsibility for feeding our soul life. The possibilities are endless .

We can keep alive the memories of significant moments in our spiritual journey – not so much the outer events but the life nourishing impact. We can for instance, remember our significant sacred vows - remembering the inner experience of clarity and freedom and consent to feed and continue to be strengthened in the present moment. Osuna says – ‘put a good day into the heart’ . We also, can feed constantly on sacred texts and scriptures, in the cycle of liturgies , feed on spiritual symbols, feed on spiritual canticles and feed on the maxims and wisdom saying passed on to us. So in all of this the proverbial wisdom is that we are what we eat.

Spiritual remembering and being remembered.

We get to the heart of Osuna's teaching in this seemingly impossible possibility of remembering God constantly. Let Osuna reframe this for us . He speaks of remembering as a divine activity so that in truth, it's not so much that we are remembering God constantly, and certainly not that we are trying to think about God constantly, but more that we are being remembered constantly in dimensions beyond ordinary awareness. In this sense, he says, we are being remembered in the book of life; we are remembered at an essential level of being that 'vivifies' or quickens all the powers of soul to life. This spiritual recollection transcends ordinary remembering and particular memories in time and space. It is remembering where the initiative is shifted – it a transforming gift that we can only prepare for and participate in.

Contemplation as remembering God in all things.

For Osuna an important preparation is to actively seek to remember God in all things. Everything we experience in the natural world , if we hold it in our awareness long enough can become a spiritual reminder of qualities of goodness, of beauty and of truth . To hold in our mind (that is remember) the nourishing properties of bread we expand and open our act of remembering beyond this particular sensual experience, opening it wider to remember the fullness of nourishment without limitation . The very qualities of life giving goodness in our contemplation with bread reminds us of the nourishment and the fullness of nourishment and sweetness in a life that is experienced in God.

Remembering, loving and knowing transformed.

If we go back to the maxim – Remember God constantly and call out to him in sighs' - the second half opens to the fuller possibilities of spiritual recollection. Osuna is always moving towards the greater possibility in this life of all the human potentials being recollected in God so that they work seamlessly in a radically new way. We can get a feel for his complex and visionary understanding of spiritual recollection.

What has been happening in the soul is the transformation of memory to be capable of living more constantly in spiritual remembrance. In this transfiguring he says – the memory now serves the soul by intensifying spiritual desires. The very aliveness of soul we remember constantly makes us long for even deeper fuller life. The 'calling out to God ' then refers to this sighing in an

inarticulate yearning movement of the soul for what is always more life. So here we might begin to see how the transformed human power of memory works seamlessly with the transformed power of the loving will. 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven' is a living possibility.

Silent contemplation and inner 'sighing'.

Osuna describes a contemplative practice to participate in this new aligning . He suggests that we take short evocative phrase - like 'God of my heart and my innermost being' and that we bring it into the quietness of mind - not meditating on the meanings, but saying it as a silent inner aspiration and movement of desire. In each inarticulate movement of the loving will what we are doing is let go into an expanded awareness beyond this moment and this space to an expanded awareness of the fullness and completeness of being in God.

Living in spiritual remembrance

But there is more. Not only is there this working together of memory and the will but also the working together of spiritual perception . It is as if we begin to remember what was always known in a spiritual dimension . This spiritual memory of a way of being always known was what the ancients called the memory of paradise of the heart - from where all life flows. In spiritual recollection we remember and love this way of being . We begin to 'live where we love'.

Osuna describes this living in remembrance of paradise in many ways. It is not an explanation but an evocation of recollection as a manner of being. *'The memory of the recollected is like a breeze, an enkindling the fire of love that has not gone out. It is like a drop of vinegar penetrating the soil of the heart or the sweet voice of someone we dearly love that awakens gentle delight in the inner being of the one listening, a fragrance that makes us yearn for its source or the remembrance of a past pleasure that instils joy in us once more.'*

In its fullness the gift of living in remembrance is more than a transient experience . It is a way of speaking about a constant state of soul that endures . Spiritual recollection is independent of outer circumstances, is not tied to consolation, but even in suffering and death it is living in hope.

